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ABSTRACT

This conference session proposal describes a project designed to assist a group of teacher researchers from the Amarillo, Texas Independent School District. The project was led by West Texas A&M University personnel. It was structured to improve educational policies and practices by designing and conducting research in school settings. A cadre of teachers was trained to use appropriate statistical techniques to analyze data, with mentoring support provided by the University personnel. Researchers identified problems they wished to study from a menu of problems identified by the school district administrators and teachers, then developed action research projects on such topics as the impact of leadership effectiveness on student achievement, the impact of service-learning programs, and the effects of Head Start home-based programs on achievement. During the spring semester, the school district provided 2 days of release time for each participant to gather data. The teacher researchers were paid to present their findings to other school personnel. They also received resources to present their findings at conferences of learned societies. The project developed systematic procedures for integrating participants' research findings into school district decision making processes. (SM)

**A Proposal entitled
School/University Collaborative Research:
Teachers As Researchers**

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1

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**Summary for a
50-Minute Concurrent Session**

University researchers and public school teachers collaborate in research projects that are identified by area school districts' personnel. Action research projects are jointly designed and conducted by teachers. School districts provide release time and stipends for teachers to conduct the research. University researchers provide instructional and technical assistance as needed.

A. Title "School/University Collaborative Research: Teachers as Researchers."

B. Objectives:

1. Describe why collaborative research is advantageous for both the university and public school partners.
2. Describe how the program can be instigated.
3. Describe the procedures used to conduct the project.
4. Identify potential research topics that are manageable for novice researchers.
5. Provide evaluative data that allows participants to judge the quality of the project

C. Program Description:

This project was initially designed to provide assistance for a group of teacher researchers from the Amarillo, Texas Independent School District. These teachers participated in a research design project led by West Texas A&M University personnel. The researchers identified problems they wished to study from a menu of problems identified by school district administrators and teachers.

The class work has resulted in the development of action research projects. These research projects were completed except gathering and analyzing data and drawing conclusions. During the spring semester, the school district provides two days of release time for each participant to gather the data and pays them a small stipend to present their findings to other school personnel. Additionally, teacher researchers were provided with resources to present their finding to conferences of learned societies. More importantly, however, this project developed systematic procedures for integrating their research findings into school district decision-making processes.

D. Description of Methodology:

The presenters will use oral presentations supported by media to accomplish the presentation objectives. Time will be provided for participants to ask questions and react to the presentation.

E. Program Summary:

Educators are aware of the challenges of improving education. They must develop curricula that will help every student to learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for our society to be perpetuated and to be improved. We must establish new standards of excellence for schools to be successful. The National Council on Educational Standards and Testing (1992) addressed the issue of standards in a document entitled Raising Standards for American Education. To create quality schools with high standards for students, equally high standards must be set for those who teach. We will not improve the quality of teaching until teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills to develop and carry out basic curriculum improvement.

For teachers to develop the requisite knowledge and skills needed to improve the curricula, collaborative research must be conducted. Collaborative research requires that researchers and practitioners work together to find answers to pressing educational problems. Collaborative research efforts must occur to find ways to improve education. Such research should result in practitioners learning the knowledge and skills from researchers that they need to conduct research without assistance. We must give teacher researchers the knowledge, skills, and need tools to study educational problems scientifically. When this occurs teachers will make better decisions and improve their educational practices.

With this in mind, the Amarillo Independent School District (AISD) requested that West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) collaborate in the Teacher As Researcher project. The project was structured to achieve the goal of improving educational policies and practices by

designing and conducting research in school settings. Consequently, the following objectives were formulated:

Objectives

1. Train a cadre of teacher researchers to use appropriate statistical techniques to analyze data
2. Provide mentoring support by university personnel for teacher researchers
3. Disseminate teacher researchers' findings through publications and presentations
4. Develop systematic procedures for integrating research findings into the school district's decision-making processes

Program Description:

During the 1996 Fall Term, twenty-two Amarillo Independent School District (AISD) teachers volunteered to participate in professional development activities focused upon designing action research projects. West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) faculty members provided the training in designing action research projects that were identified by AISD teachers and administrators.

As the instructor taught each element of research design, participants used this new knowledge to design their study. As each individual or group completed a new section of their respective studies, WTAMU personnel assessed their work and made recommendations for improvement.

This process resulted in the following research projects being designed. Teachers studied these following research topics such as:

1. "Effects of Leadership Effectiveness on Student Achievement" a study of the relationships and effects of organizational health upon student achievement
2. "The Impact of Service Learning Programs" a study of the effects of service learning upon secondary students' attendance, dropout rates and achievement
3. "Empowering Students and Parents: How Parents' Knowledge of Learning Styles

- Impacts Student Achievement" a study of the effects of parental involvement upon the student achievement of sixth-grade students
4. "The Relationship of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Michael Eaton Writing Program Upon Students' Achievement" a study which will evolve into basic research of the effects of teacher empowerment
 5. "The Effects of a Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities on the Kindergarten Achievement of Children with Speech and Language Impairment" a study of the impact of the preschool program for children with disabilities
 6. "The Effects of Head Start Home-based Programs on the Achievement" a study comparing the effectiveness of home-based and center-based Head Start programs
 7. "The Impact of Learning Styles Training for Teachers upon Students' Achievement" a causal-comparative study of the effectiveness of learning styles training for teachers.

The researchers have made significant progress in learning to conduct action research, however, they needed additional training in the use of statistics. Therefore, a new graduate statistics course that focuses upon (SPSS) computerized statistics programs was provided. Participants are taught how to build flexible databases, to learn the assumptions required to use each statistic, and to learn appropriate uses of each statistic.

University personnel have collaborated on each research project assisting in the editing of manuscripts detailing the research. These manuscripts were submitted for publication in professional journals. The research has been presented at the conferences of appropriate professional associations and to the faculty of the participating school districts. The school districts have also presented a synopsis of research findings to the school board, to all school administrators, and to site management teams.

The program has expanded to other school districts. This semester 71 public school teachers from four school districts are participating in the project. Participants consistently indicate that learning action research skills are relevant because they are seeking solutions to problems that are pertinent to their professional experiences.